

MLU-7.2: Ethics and Morality in Islam

The Definition of Morality:

The term “morality” can be used either

1. Descriptively to refer to a code of conduct put forward by a society or some other group, such as a religion, or accepted by an individual for his own behavior.
2. Normatively to refer to a code of conduct that, given specified conditions, would be put forward by all rational persons.

The Holy Qur,ân has repeatedly drawn our attention to Divine laws of nature because the source and origin of these laws are the Divine attributes which are a prerequisite for making a human being into a moral being, so that he should, as far as his human limitations allow, make the Divine Character,

The whole of the Holy Qur,ân is full with moral teachings, and the entire canvas of the Divine plan of human existence on earth is under its purview.

If we analyze its moral code we would find in it a world of personal ethics, family morals, social morals, business, political ethics, and literary ethics (e.g. 2:177-209; 2:215-242). In short there is not an aspect of human actions, psychological conditions, circumstances, rights, excellence and etiquette which has been left out of the Qur'ânic moral teachings.

Importance of morality:

One of the most important aspects of a Muslim's life is for him to have a high standard of morals. Since the beginning of Islam, Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) was mainly concerned with teaching and disciplining Muslims to have the best manners and the best personal characteristics. His personal life and behavior were reflective of his teachings, which were revealed to him by Allah (S.W.T.). In the Noble Qur'an , in surat Al-Qalam, Allah (S.W.T.) describes Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) saying: “And verily, you (O Muhammad) are on an exalted standard of character.” (Verse 4)

The Prophet's (S.A.W.) high standard of manners made him a model for all Muslims to follow. The Prophet (S.A.W.) used to emphasize how important good manners are for Muslims. For example, Imams Bukhari and Muslim reported that the Prophet (S.A.W) mentioned the following:

- “The best of you is the best among you in conduct.”
In another authentic narration, the Prophet (S.A.W.) mentioned that:
- “The heaviest thing to be placed in the balance of a believing slave on the Day of Judgment will be good behavior. And Allah hates the one who uses bad language.”

Someone once asked the Prophet (S.A.W.) what deed would lead a man to paradise, and he answered:

- “Taqwa of Allah (piety) and good conduct.” In other hadiths the Prophet (S.A.W.) made distinctions among Muslims based on their behaviors; the Prophet (S.A.W.) said:
- “The most perfect man in his faith, among the believers, is the one whose behavior is the most excellent; and the best of you are those who are the best to their wives.”

He even clarified that people will be on different levels in Paradise based on their good manners saying:

- “The dearest and nearest among you to me on the Day of Resurrection will be the one who is the best in conduct...”

Ethical system of Islam is different from other ethical systems today.

Unlike other systems, the ethical system in Islam derives from a divine source. This divine source is the revelation from Allah (S.W.T). Therefore, this system cannot be changed, or manipulated to fit our desires. It applies no matter what the time or place. This system has not been changed for thousands of years, it cannot be changed today, and it will never change until the Day of Judgment. No one, no matter who has the authority to change or alter this system, even if the whole world wants to change it. What was considered good morals in the past will remain as good moral throughout time. What was considered, as bad moral in the past will remain as bad morals forever, even if society accepts it as a norm. The system of ethics is not affected by cultural norms, because Allah (S.W.T) is the One who determined what is acceptable and not acceptable.

The Noble Qur'an is very detailed and clearly mentions the significance of good manners, just like it mentions the importance of belief, the importance of worship, and all our daily affairs.

The Noble Qur'an mentions several good acts of morality repeatedly, for example:

- Dealing with your parents in the best manner
- Being nice to your relatives and neighbors
- Taking care of orphans and the poor
- Telling the truth and being honest
- Being sincere in all of your intentions
- Fulfilling your promises
- Treating all people fairly

The Noble Quran goes as far as to teach us the way that we should walk. Allah (S.W.T.) says, in surat Luqman “And, be moderate in your walking.” (Verse 19), and in surat Al-Furqan, Allah (S.W.T.) says “ And the servants of the most Beneficent (Allah) are those who walk on the earth in modesty.” (Verse 63), and also, in surat Al-Isra’, Allah (S.W.T.) “And walk not on earth with conceit and arrogance. Verily, you can neither slit nor penetrate the earth, nor can you attain a stature like the mountains in height.” (Verse 37)

The Noble Qur'an also teaches us the way we should behave in a gathering, Allah (S.W.T.) says, in surat Al-Mujadilah “O you who believe! When you are told to make room in assemblies do so, Allah will provide enough room for you.” (Verse 11)

And unlike other ethical systems, Islam's moral system is a very detailed and complete package. Islam addresses every aspect of human life, no matter how minor. It is a complete package—it does not lack anything that needs to be completed nor does it have any defects that need to be amended.

It even guides us on the treatment of animals. The Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) said:

- “Fear Allah when you treat the animals, take care of them, keep them in good health no matter whether you ride on them or are raising them for their meat.”
- In another hadith, the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) said: “...when you slaughter an animal, make your slaughter in the best manner. Let one of you sharpen his knife and give ease to the animal (in order to reduce the pain).”

In short, forbearance, honesty, truthfulness, steadfastness, contentment, self-control, bravery, chastity, all these are moral qualities of high values, yet these become a part of the list of good moral qualities only if they are free of all ill-intentions.

First moral duty

Honesty:

Islam orders the Muslim to be honest to himself and others. This order repeatedly comes in the Noble Qur'an and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (SAWS). Islam orders the Muslim to tell the truth even if it is against the teller's interest. Orders him not to cheat or deceive other people. A Muslim is ordered by Allah to be honest in his words and deeds, privately and publicly alike.

Implication of Honesty

Honesty in words implies telling the truth in all cases and under all conditions. Honesty also implies fulfilling the promise, whether written or given orally, in text and spirit. Honesty also implies giving the right advice to the one who asks for it.

Honesty also implies doing one's work as sincerely and as perfectly as possible. Honesty also implies carrying out duties as fully as possible whether the person is supervised or not. Honesty means giving every person his due rights without his asking for these rights.

Honesty means doing the right thing in the right way at the right time. Honesty means objectivity in judgment, objectivity in evaluation, and objectivity in decisions of all types. Honesty implies the right selection of personnel and the right promotion of personnel, i.e., selection by merit and promotion by merit, not by temper or favouritism or personal relations.

Honesty is a blanket term that covers a wide range of traits. It covers telling the truth, sincerity in work, carrying out duties, fulfilling one's word, objective judgments, and objective decisions. Honesty is the opposite of lying, the opposite of bluffing, the opposite of hypocrisy, the opposite of favoritism, and the opposite of deceit.